

# The GEOGRAPHICAL JOURNAL

Vol LXXXIII No 5



May 1934

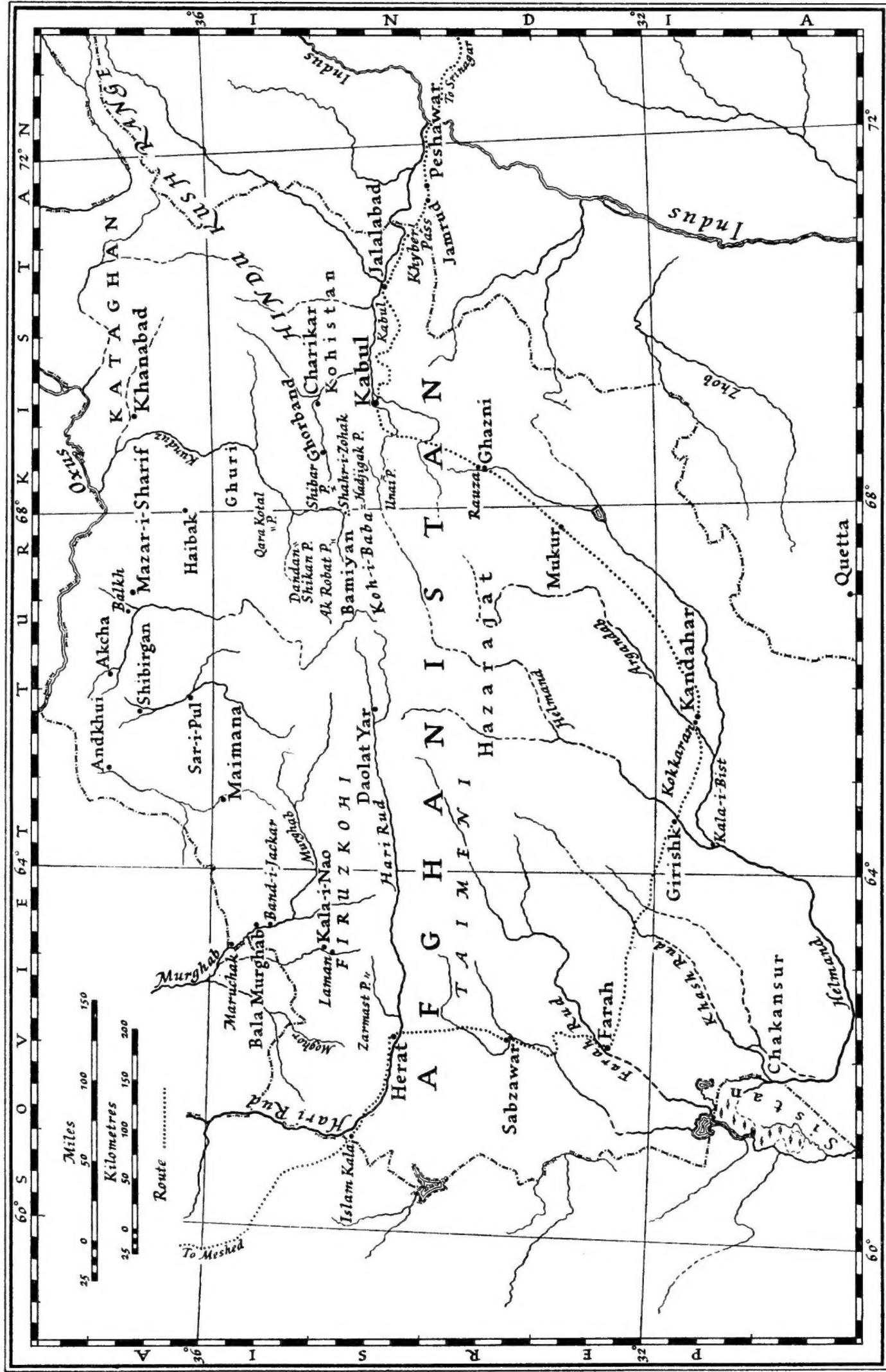
IN PERSIA AND AFGHANISTAN WITH THE CITROËN  
TRANS-ASIATIC EXPEDITION: *A paper read at the Evening  
Meeting of the Society on 20 November 1933, by*

JOSEPH HACKIN

TO begin with, I wish on behalf of the Citroën-Haardt Expedition to express our sincere thanks for the most valuable help which the Royal Geographical Society so generously gave to the expedition. When in 1930 the plans of the expedition were suddenly changed, and it was decided to go through Afghanistan and northern India, the Society supplied the late Mr. Haardt with many maps and furnished him with important information which otherwise would have taken many months to obtain. I feel therefore all the more honoured to speak before this distinguished audience, and I hope that the little information I am able to give on the geography and the ethnography of Afghanistan may be of some interest to the Society.

The original project as conceived and worked out by G. M. Haardt included an itinerary from Beirut to Peking without any break in the use of mechanical transport; but circumstances to which I have alluded and into the details of which I shall not now enter compelled the leader of the expedition to allow for a detour by southern Afghanistan, north-western India, and the Kashmir Hunza. This route presented in the region of the Pamirs such obstacles as were bound to break the mechanical continuity. For the original plan comprising a single group of cars leaving Beirut for Peking, a different organization had to be substituted: the expedition was divided into two groups, one starting from Beirut, the other from Peking, making towards each other and endeavouring to reduce as far as possible the break in continuity imposed by the unusually difficult nature of the ground. I joined the first group, Beirut-Pamir, which was to leave its cars on the other side of Gilgit to proceed northwards on horseback. The meeting of the two groups took place at Aqsu, in Chinese Turkistan.

The material collected by the Citroën-Haardt Expedition in Afghanistan shows the interest and the diversity of the ethnic elements which make up the population of the country. As these ethnic features have a rich historic background, the expedition had the opportunity of observing many ancient monuments on its route: Pre-Islamic monuments which call to mind the



*Routes of the Citroën Trans-Asiatic Expedition in Afghanistan*



remarkable fusion of Hellenism, Buddhism, and Iranian Mazdeism; Islamic monuments which bear witness to the astounding rise and splendour of the Ghaznavids' capital; and, at Herat, the remains of the glory of the Timurid age. Moreover the expedition could also note the influence of human races, different in origin and formation, on the country itself.

Entering Afghanistan by Herat, the expedition of G. M. Haardt and L. Auduoin-Dubreuil proceeded to Kabul by the southern road which passes almost entirely through purely "Afghan" country, through Farah, Girishk, Kandahar, and Ghazni. A northern itinerary, which the expedition had originally planned to take, was partially reconnoitered by M. de Vassoigne, who went from Herat to Maimana. Moreover I have recently had the opportunity of passing along the new route Kabul-Mazar-i-Sharif-Balkh-Shibirgan-Andkhui-Maimana-Herat. In this way the expedition as a whole has collected data on several itineraries which form a large circuit in Afghanistan.

The expedition is greatly indebted to the Government of His late Majesty Nadir Shah for facilitating the task of its artist, cameramen, photographers, archaeologist, and other specialists who were enabled to collect documents and materials for future study. Thanks to the efficient and thorough help of the Afghan Government and to that of the local authorities who acted on instructions from H.R.H. the Prime Minister, the expedition did not lose a single day, and was given the opportunity of studying certain ethnic elements relatively distant from its route.

I regret to say that I can only give you in this lecture an incomplete and fragmentary account of the value of the material collected, as the limited time does not permit me to dwell on details.

All travellers who have stayed at Herat have noted its great importance and the richness of its soil. Until recently however, owing to the poor condition of the tracks which connected it, it has been isolated from other parts of Afghanistan. This quasi-isolation, which greatly hampered the trade of the province, will end with the completion of two new roads. One, a mountain road passing through the Hazarajat, will bring Kabul within three days' travel of Herat. It has already been constructed as far as Daolat Yar. The other, 450 miles long, connects Herat with Mazar-i-Sharif, the capital of Afghan Turkistan. This road serves such important economic centres as Andkhui and Maimana, and connects the north-eastern part of the Chahar Aimak country (Taimeni, Hazarah, Firuzkoti, Jemshedi) with Herat. Although certain sections of this track will have to be further improved, the journey from Mazar-i-Sharif can, at the present time, be made in less than four days.

The monuments of Herat, especially those of the Timurid epoch, have been greatly damaged. The Mosque (Musallah) and the School (Madressa), two monuments of the fifteenth century, have been described by Colonel Yate, who saw them in 1885, shortly before they were destroyed. Their place is still marked by the minarets which were spared and which preserve in certain places delicately and beautifully designed *kashi* (tile work). With a telephoto lens we secured several good photographs of the principal motives of decoration on these minarets. I should also like to mention the so-called Shah Rukh Tomb, which is in point of fact not only the tomb of Shah Rukh, great-grandson

of Tamerlane, but also of Baisangor, grandson of Tamerlane. At Gazarga, which is a great pilgrimage centre, is the much-venerated tomb of Abu Ismail Khwaja Ansari, who died in A.D. 1088; there also is the mausoleum of Dost Muhammad Khan, the Great Amir of Afghanistan, who, after a victorious campaign, died in Herat in A.D. 1863.

Beyond Sabzawar we come to the country where pure Afghan is spoken and where the population belongs to the Durrani group. The first tribe that we meet there is the Nurzei. After the collapse of Nadir Shah's Empire in the eighteenth century, the Durrani tribes, under the inspiring leadership of Ahmed Shah, assumed supremacy over all the other tribes of Afghanistan.

Farah, the first important town after Sabzawar, occupied a small portion of the area of the former Prophtasia. It is one of the markets situated on the border of the rich province known in antiquity by the name of Sakasthana. Wars and invasions have, in great part, transformed the present-day Sistan into desert. The region of Chakansur, which has been one of the important centres of ancient Sakasthana, has however been partially reclaimed, and eventually cultivation will be possible in the entire area after the construction of irrigation canals branching off from the Khash Rud and the Helmand River, in the Nasirabad region. This work is being carried on by the Sariks Turkoman, newcomers to the country. Those Turkoman belong to the same tribe that has reclaimed and cultivated the ancient marshes of the Murghab, between Bala Murghab and Maruchak, in north-western Afghanistan.

At Girishk the expedition was fortunate in finding several representatives of the Durrani group, members of the tribes of the Barakzei, Muhammadzei, Popelzei, and Alizei of Zamindawar, one of the most important tribes of the region. Before the arrival of the expedition at Girishk I had, with Commander Pecqueur, the opportunity of making a trip to Kala-i-Bist, where we saw some advanced elements of the Achekzei tribe. Kala-i-Bist, one of the favoured residences of Mahmud of Ghazni, is beautifully situated at the confluence of the Helmand and the Argandab rivers. Its citadels suffered greatly when besieged by Nadir Shah in the eighteenth century. The only monument of the Ghaznavid period still remaining at Kala-i-Bist is an arch of burnt brick, decorated with motives of sober elegance.

In the Doab country, between the Helmand and the Argandab, the few rare villages are inhabited by the Nurzei, the Atchekzei, and the Alizei. The Argandab may be considered the extreme limit of the territory populated by the tribes of the Durrani group. Having crossed the Argandab we came to the land of the Ghilzai. Near the ford of the Argandab, at Kokkaran, stands the tomb of the great hero of the Ghilzai epic, whom European historians call Mir Weis (Mir Faez) and his compatriots Hadj Mir Khan.

H.E. the Minister of the Interior of Afghanistan, Muhammad Goul Khan, who was at Kandahar, greatly facilitated our task by summoning there men of both the Durrani and the Ghilzai groups, and by organizing several singing and dancing festivals. The Durrani group was represented by men of the Popelzei tribe, and the Ghilzai by the Taraki. Although the fundamental theme of their dances is the same, the nuances vary. The movements of the Popelzei are, I should say, more elegant and more languid than the rude movements of the Taraki, who dance to a much faster rhythm.



*Phot. M. O. Williams*

*The Bamiyan valley*





*Entering Afghanistan at Islam Kala*

*Phot. M. O. Williams*

Thanks to the Governor of Ghazni, two other ethnic groups were summoned to Mukur. The first was represented by the Alikhel and the second by the Karotee tribesmen. The dances and the songs registered at Mukur by the expedition on sound films are typically Afghan. Here we were in the heart of the Ghilzai country, and no one but the Andar, who live in the vicinity of Ghazni, could give a better idea of the fierce beauty of the Afghan dances. Beyond Mukur, the Ghilzai come into contact with the Hazarah, mountaineers of Mongol origin, descendants of the military colonies brought there at the beginning of the thirteenth century by the great conqueror Genghiz Khan. The long-haired Hazarah Jaguri have retained a particularly pure Mongol type and their relations with the Ghilzai Suleimankhel were not always especially cordial.

Ghazni, the ancient capital of Mahmud, is in great part the fief of the Andar, who may be considered as some of the best representatives of the Ghilzai type. The Andar, the Suleimankhel of Zurmatt, and the Wardak come frequently to the bazaar of Ghazni, which is the great market for *pustins*, sheepskin coats decorated with delicate embroideries. In the city of Mahmud, ruthlessly sacked by the Ghoride Sultans, there only remain a few monuments, but they are all important specimens of the Muslim art of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The towers of Victory erected by Mahmud and his great-grandson Ma'asud the Third, the tomb of the father of Mahmud Subuktegin, the tomb of Mahmud himself in the village of Rauza, the Mosque of the Sultan Abd-ur-Rezak, which is a remarkable example of a fortified mosque, all magnificently illustrate the Ghaznavid art which was so pitilessly dealt with by Ghoride invaders. It is possible to say without hesitation that Ghazni is to Islam what Bamiyan is to Buddhism. From the top of the citadel of Ghazni one sees an immense area of ruins; the town of Mahmud, then two towers preserved by their massiveness from the Ghoride's fury, and, at the foot of the hills among luxuriant vegetation, the tomb of the Great Conqueror.

On the way from Ghazni to Kabul the road leads through a part of the territory of the Wardak. The Wardak belong to the Ghilzai group, but they are better policed and more amiable than the others. Their dances have not the crudeness of the Karotee and the Alikhel dances which we saw at Mukur. Their movements are a triumph of suppleness and grace.

During our stay at Kabul we attended several receptions and were granted a Royal audience. Then the expedition went on to Bamiyan. We reached this famous archaeological site by a road which traverses a part of ancient Kapiça (the Kohdaman and the Kohistan of to-day), an ancient lacustrine basin of remarkable fertility. The road then followed the torrential course of the Ghorband, and reached the divide between the Oxus and the Indus basins at the Shibar pass in a region populated by the Hazarah. It joined the ancient road from Kabul to Bamiyan by the passes of Unai and Hadjigak near the ruins of the Shahr-i-Zohak citadel destroyed by Genghiz Khan in A.D. 1222. The word *Bamiyan*, an Iranian name, is the normal Persian derivative of the word *Bamikan*, which is used in the pehlvi *Bundahes* (J. Marquart, P. Pelliot). Until the time of the Mongol conquest (A.D. 1222) Bamiyan might have been one of the most important centres of Middle Asia. Situated about halfway between Balkh (Bactra of the Greeks) and Peshawar (ancient Purushapura) on one of

the great international trade-routes, its valley was a natural halting-place for caravans. After the hardships endured in crossing the high passes of the Hindu Kush, caravan leaders and merchants could regain their strength there before continuing the difficult journey. The importance of Bamiyan must have been further increased during the Buddhist epoch when the Balkh-Peshawar route represented, as Mr. A. Foucher said, "a link between the Indian and the Scythian halves of the Empire of the great conqueror Kushana Kanishka" (first century A.D.).

At that time the city of Balkh, which had become an international trading centre, was situated at the cross-roads of the three most important highways of Asia: one leading west, towards the Roman Empire; one leading north-east, towards China; and one leading south-east, towards India. It was also at that time that the barbarian Emperor, miraculously converted to Buddhism, used his power and wealth to satisfy his ardent religious zeal. A peculiarity of the local topography was responsible for the fortune of Bamiyan, for "in the middle part of the valley the northern cliffs of tertiary conglomerates offered to the pick and chisel of artisans high vertical surfaces which were used to advantage by the patrons and their architects" (Foucher).

During the second and third centuries A.D., Buddhist institutions multiplied with great rapidity at Bamiyan owing to the impetus given by the patronage of such rulers as Kanishka and his successors. The advent of the Sassanian dynasty in the third century and the extension of its conquest towards the east did not seem to impede the development of the sanctuaries and monasteries at Bamiyan. The rulers of the valley, successors of the great Kushanas, fell under the influence of their powerful neighbours, and between the fourth and the seventh centuries Bamiyan became a centre of Iranian art, or, to be more exact, of Irano-Buddhist art. Bamiyan apparently did not suffer greatly from the brief occupation of the Ephtalites in the fifth century. Pilgrims from far-distant China continued to wend their way towards India, passing through Bamiyan; the most famous of them, Hsuang Tsang, whom Sir Aurel Stein calls his "Patron Saint," saw the sanctuaries of the celebrated valley in A.D. 632. Less than thirty years after the visit of this famous pilgrim the Arabs made their first appearance in the valley, but the sanctuaries remained intact. A Korean monk, Huei Chao, who had passed there at the beginning of the eighth century, found them still in a good state of preservation. The Sanscrit manuscript in tardive *Gupta* characters, discovered by the writer in the "G" grotto, belongs in all probability to this epoch.

The Buddhist occupation of Bamiyan must have come to an end in the ninth century. During the Mongol invasion Bamiyan was a part of the Khwarezmian domains. Mütügen, the grandson of Genghiz Khan and son of Jagatai, was killed during the siege of Shar-i-Gholghola, the Muhammadan citadel of Bamiyan. In the *Tarikh-i-Jehan Goshai* it is stated that after this event "the Mongol army made all the more haste to conquer the city, and when it was taken, Genghiz Khan ordered as punishment that all living things therein—men as well as animals—be killed; that no prisoners be taken; that not even a child in his mother's womb be spared; that after the capture of the city no one should ever live there, and that nothing should be built on its ruins, which were named Mao Baligh, the 'Bad City'." The chronicle adds: "True,





*Phot. M. O. Williams*

*Crossing the Argandab near Kandahar*



*Bulalah, near Bamiyan*

*Phot. M. Morizet*



*The Bala Hissar, Herat*

*Phot. M. O. Williams*



nowadays no animated creature lives there." These events took place in the first months of the year A.D. 1222 (619 Hejira), and Genghiz Khan's malediction still seems to hang over the ruins of Shar-i-Gholghola. Since that time Bamiyan ceased to count among the important cities of Afghanistan, and the abandonment of the great continental highways, supplanted after the fifteenth century by maritime routes, completed the downfall of the old city.

To-day Bamiyan is the residence of a Governor of the third class, who is under the Hakim-i-Qaland, who resides at Charikar. The natural frontiers of the district of Bamiyan, which belongs to the *vilayet* of Kabul, are the Shibar Pass on the east, the Ak Robat Pass on the north, the Band-i-Emir on the west, and the Koh-i-Baba on the south. Bamiyan has also great interest for the ethnologist. The population of the valley (properly speaking) consists chiefly of Tadjiks of the Iranian race, but the tributary valleys are populated by the Hazarah, who represent the Mongol element. In the high valleys of the Foladi live a small number of Kizilbash who are of Turkish origin. The Afghans come to graze their herds in the high valleys from May to September by virtue of the privileges granted to them in 1896-97 by the Amir Abd-ur-Rahman Khan. These Afghans belong to the following clans: the Taraki, the Akakhel, the Omarkhel, the Mandozei, the Daulezei, and the Ahmedzei Suleimankhel. The first four clans go to pastures of the Band-i-Emir region, the Daulezei to the heights dominating the Ghandak region, and the Ahmedzei to the high valley of the Foladi and neighbouring pastures. The Tadjik, the Hazarah, and the Kizilbash represent the settled element, while the different Afghan tribes, who obey the rhythm of periodic migrations, represent the nomadic element. In the high valley of the Circa, at an altitude of roughly 8500 feet, the settled population grow two varieties of wheat—an autumn wheat (*tirmai*) which is sown in the second half of October, and a spring wheat (*ba'ari*) which is sown about the end of March. The spring wheat ripens first.

The new road which connects Kabul with Mazar-i-Sharif, the capital of Afghan Turkistan, does not pass through Bamiyan. The ancient track which follows the Bamiyan valley and goes over the passes of Ak Robat, Dandan Shikan, and Qara Kotal before coming to the Bactrian plain, is now almost abandoned. Bamiyan will be connected with the new Herat-Kabul road by a branch which is actually under construction. In this way the picturesque region of Band-i-Emir and the mountainous region of Deh Zengui, which is in the heart of the Hazarah country, will be made easily accessible.

The road from Kabul to Mazar-i-Sharif branches off from the Kabul-Bamiyan road after 123 miles, and, taking an entirely new course, follows the Bamiyan river through grand rocky gorges. Five and a half miles from the bifurcation stand the ruins of the city of Shahr Khoshak and of its citadel dominating a great curve of the river. They were probably destroyed by Genghiz Khan. As far as Doab-Mikhizanin the road passes through the Hazarah country. It does not however go as far as the confluence of the Bamiyan and the Kunduz rivers. Leaving the valley it crosses the Kampirak and the "Caravan" Passes and, following the line of a series of hillocks, comes to the Ghuri plain. Numerous Afghan elements belonging to the Akakhel, Tinzei, Utrei, and Ahmedzei (Suleimankhel) camp there. A little before



Ghuri, at 120 miles, a new road branches off toward Khanabad (Katagan). The new road joins the old one at Haibak. The ethnic elements now show a marked difference, as here we come into contact with the Turkistan Usbegs whom we met at Mazar-i-Sharif. The Tadjiks and the Usbegs live in contact at Balkh, the former capital of Bactria. The city with its many Buddhist and Muhammadan ruins is dominated by an imposing citadel.

The industrious Usbegs have greatly modified the aspect of the country between Akcha and Shibirgan, by reclaiming and cultivating great areas of marshes overgrown with reeds. These areas, uncultivated less than ten years ago, now produce rich corn and cotton crops. The Andkhui region, in the Turkoman country, also shows remarkable development. There the area of irrigated land will be further extended after the construction of a great dam in the mountainous district of Gurzivan. The execution of this project, which is actually under consideration, will relieve the ever-growing over-population of this oasis.

The Turkoman occupy the region between Andkhui, Bala Murghab, and Maruchak. There also, especially between Bala Murghab and Maruchak, vast marshy areas have been reclaimed and transformed into cultivated field and pasture by this industrious population. The cultivation of corn and cotton, the breeding of sheep famous for their skins (*karakul*), and the manufacture of rugs are the principal sources of prosperity in this region. To show the progress achieved in this part of Afghanistan, it is sufficient to compare the actual prosperity with the conditions that existed there in 1885, as described by Colonel C. E. Yate, then a Member of the Commission for the Delimitation of the Russo-Afghan frontier<sup>1</sup>:

The heat just now in the Maruchak valley is tremendous. Not that I believe it registers anything excessively high by the thermometer, as with a good roof over one's head one would hardly feel it, but in the sun it is overpowering. The whole valley is uninhabited, and the ground is one dense tangled mass of thistles, flowers, grasses, and weeds of every description, standing between two and three feet high, and full of horse-flies and mosquitoes. For the last ten days there has not been a breath of wind, and very often a heavy dew at night. This all dries in the sun and the steam or heat rising from this and the damp ground and the dense vegetation, all now drying up, without a breath of air to carry it off, almost suffocates one.

Colonel Yate however foresaw that a period of tranquillity like that from which Afghanistan now benefits might bring great improvement to the land.

Once, however, [he remarks] the place has been populated and cleared, I see no reason why it should not become another garden again. With good land and climate, lots of water, and the hills around to go to in summer, what more could settlers want? At present, certainly Maruchak is nothing but a mass of thistles.

The present improvement of this unproductive land has also brought about a change of climate, which, although hot, is now perfectly healthy.

The settled Turkoman are not the only inhabitants of this region. There are also a good number of more or less settled Afghan herdsmen belonging to

<sup>1</sup> 'Northern Afghanistan,' by Col. C. E. Yate, pp. 220-224.

the Ghilzai group (Shakzei and Otak tribes). The Afghans, especially the Ghilzai, have penetrated the whole northern part of Afghanistan, which proves their great vitality. They are particularly numerous in the valley of the Sar-i-Pul river, where they constitute important groups living in contact with the Usbegs. The Afghans are also to be found beyond Bala Murghab, near Moghor, but in this region they belong to the Achekzei tribe. Taking into consideration the fact that the majority of this tribe lives on the Afghan-Baluchistan borders, where they are definitely settled, it must be admitted that this expansion is in reality a quasi-separation.

There are also some other Afghans of the Durrani group in this region, but beyond Bala Murghab the bulk of the population consists of Jemshedi and Firuzkohi, who belong to a group known by the name of Chahar Aimak. My opinion is that these ethnic elements, considerably different in physical aspect from the pure Hazarah, represent a mixture of Hazarah and Tadjik. Colonel Yate rightly places one of the limits of the country of the Firuzkohi at Band-i-Jackar, near the bridge over the Murghab, at a place where the river is greatly constricted. From there the road leads through Kala-i-Nao, Hadji Khoshnor, and Laman to the Zarmast pass, which is about 8000 feet high. The pass is reached by a good road climbing slopes covered by juniper trees. In this way we returned to Herat.

I cannot flatter myself that I have described vividly enough the diverse aspects of this country where the interest of the traveller is so greatly attracted by man and nature. Many observations of the most varied order cannot, alas, find place in the scope of a lecture, and I had therefore to limit myself to a few rapid notes. My sole object has been to show you, by travelling with you along the new Afghan tracks, the quality and the richness of the ethnic elements and the remarkable effort which is being made to improve the general economic conditions of the country.

### DISCUSSION

Before the paper the PRESIDENT (Major-General Sir PERCY COX) said: The lecturer this evening is Monsieur Joseph Hackin. The Citroën Trans-Asiatic Expedition was one of a series undertaken by the Citroën organization, well known both for the quality of their cars and for new inventions in the direction of motor transport, and also for bringing various remote and uncivilized portions of the world within the purview and reach of civilization, not only in the interests of their own organization but also in the interests of science generally. The first expedition was made across the Sahara ten years ago. Soon after that followed one from Algeria, straight across Africa to the Cape. We are to hear about the third expedition.

Two years ago we had, with very great regret, to announce the death of Monsieur Haardt who was the Citroën organizer of this expedition and of the Trans-Saharan Expedition. Unfortunately, he died in China of pneumonia.

To-night we welcome Monsieur Joseph Hackin, and it is my duty to introduce him and tell you something of his record. He is the Director of the Musée Guimet in Paris, a private museum originated by the gift of a very valuable collection by a M. Guimet, particularly associated with China and the East, Buddhism and Chinese archaeology. Monsieur Hackin is first and foremost an archaeologist, and it seems to me that it has been a great stroke of fortune that the learned Director of that Museum should have succeeded in obtaining leave



*Phot. Mme. Hackin*  
*Sariks Turkoman women, Maruchak*





*Phot. M. Morizet*  
*Sher Jan, son of the Malik of the Dauletzei*



*Phot. Mme. Hackin*  
*A Turkoman, Bala Murghab*